

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

9th April 2023 - Easter Sunday

Readings (Year A): 1st: Acts 10:34,37-43. 2nd: Colossians 3:1-4. **Gospel:** John 20:1-9

This Easter Day I'm sure all of us continue to feel uncertain about much of what is going on in life. Last year we were still coming out of Covid, and we know life is certainly not 'back to normal – even if things are much improved. This year our hearts still agonise about Ukraine, and events in the Holy Land and elsewhere are very disturbing in every sense.

The Easter Sunday Gospel can initially reflect some of that as Mary Magdalen goes to the tomb. Confusion, fear and bewilderment. St John tells of the empty tomb's discovery in terms of a new dawn. Yes, dawn breaks, but there is gradual progress as day continues.

Light and sight are often used by John in his Gospel when treating of faith; and this story uses them in testimony to the first faith in the resurrection. It was 'still dark' may denote not only the time of day, but all time before the resurrected 'light of the world.'

Mary of Magdala can explain what she sees only by usual experience - the removal of a corpse by men. Peter sees more. While he goes 'right into the tomb' and sees the linen cloths, we are yet to be told of the 'other disciple (probably John). He sees what they saw –but sees beyond. Perhaps because he was known to have surpassed others in love of Jesus; he it is on whom the light of faith shines first; 'He saw and believed.'

It is from within this new sight of faith that understanding flows; as promised in scriptural history, as we say in the creed 'and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.'

Easter must always be our realisation that it is true: our faith is not in vain; Christ is risen: Christ is alive: alive in the Father's glory, but also alive in us.

For the earliest Christians that was the main thrust of their whole preaching. When Matthias was chosen to fill the place of Judas, what was vital was that he had been with them a long time and was a witness to the resurrection.

St Paul is utterly clear in chapter 15 of his 1st letter to the Corinthians 'that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised to life on the third day. And that he appeared to Cephas (Peter) then to the disciples, then to over 500 hundred of the brethren, then to James and last to me, Paul.

He goes on with words very important in our own day to hear, as so many of our contemporaries do not believe in the Resurrection, or indeed in any life after death: which is why we see adverts for just simple cremation: no service: no nothing. Utterly wrong for us.

I have always for 55 years thought that funerals are among the most important part of a priest's parish ministry. For as St Paul says: 'Now if Christ raised from the dead is what has been preached, how can some of you be saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself cannot have been raised, and if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless.'

Paul does go on more, but here is the crucial line, 'Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep.'

Easter Sunday then should be a joyful celebratory day as we proclaim the vital heart of the Christian Faith, the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Church now gives us 50 days to enjoy the glory of the risen Christ: Alleluia; He is risen indeed.